

GAMING 101

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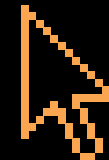
GAMING 101

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**The basics of what you need to know
about autism and video gaming**





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INTRODUCTION

Many Autistic children and young people enjoy video gaming with family and friends. Playing video games can be an inclusive and comfortable way to connect and socialise with school friends. Understanding the basics of video gaming is a great first step to equip yourself with the knowledge to support the young gamer in your life with healthy and safe gaming habits.

This guide has been developed to help parents and carers make that first step into better understanding the world of video games and having the confidence to support their child or young person to navigate through it.

A quick note before you continue reading, we use the term 'video gaming' throughout this guide. We know Autistic children and young people play a wide variety of video games, and these can be both offline (requiring no Internet connection) and online (over the internet). Regardless of whether your young gamer is playing video games on or offline, the information in this guide applies to both types of video gaming.

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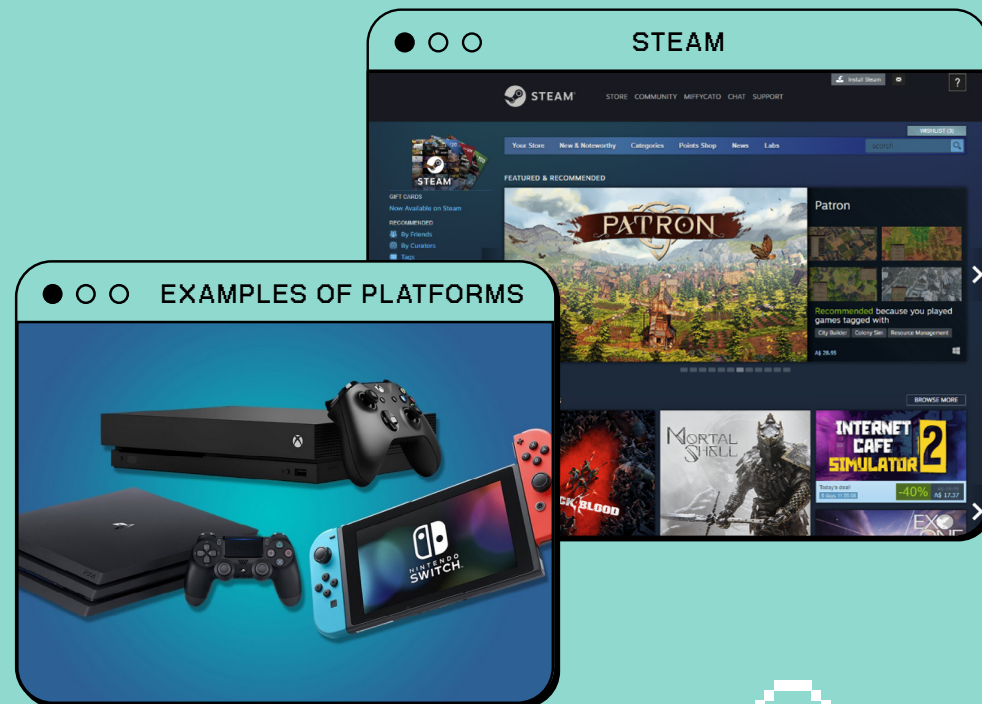
PLATFORMS

Platforms are the devices that you can use to play video games. Some examples of types of platforms include PC (personal computer), mobile, VR (virtual reality) headsets, and consoles (like PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo Switch).

Video games cannot always be played on every type of platform. Sometimes there are games that have been developed to only be played on particular devices. For example, the recently released adventure video game, *Stray*, has only been released, and can only be played, on PlayStation 4 and 5 and a PC running a Windows operating system.

There are many ways people can buy video games depending on the platform they use. Gamers who use consoles can buy and download their games using an online store on the console. Console gamers can also buy a disc or game cartridge from a physical store which can be inserted into their console. People who use a PC to play video games can also buy discs from physical stores, but most commonly now people will buy PC games from online stores.

TIP: Steam is one online store that's commonly used to buy PC games. It also has a community section where people can post on forums about the video games. People can make a Steam account and friend other Steam users, which allows you to chat to them, invite them to play video games, and see what they've been playing. You must be at least 13 years old to create an account on Steam.



GENRES

Just like movies and TV shows, video games are categorised into genres. There are many different video game genres, and sometimes games can be in multiple genres at once. The most common genres are:



ACTION

In an action game the player often needs to collect objects and avoid obstacles. The player needs to have fast reaction times and good hand-eye coordination. Some examples of action game series include LEGO video games, Kirby, and Call of Duty.



ADVENTURE

Adventure games see the player control a character in an interactive story. These style of games also usually involve exploration and puzzle solving. Some examples of adventure game series include Life is Strange™, Uncharted™, and Spider-Man®.



PLATFORMER

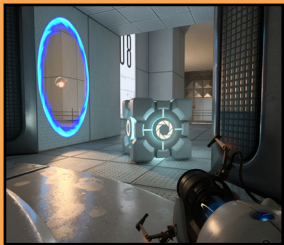
A platformer is a type of action game where the player moves the character through levels that require a lot of jumping and climbing. Platformers are typically 2D but can be 3D also. Some examples of platformer game series include Super Mario Bros., Crash Bandicoot, Sonic the Hedgehog, and LittleBigPlanet.



SHOOTER

A shooter is a type of action game where the focus is to defeat enemies using guns. Some examples of shooter game series include Doom®, Halo®, Call of Duty, and Fortnite®.





PUZZLE AND STRATEGY

Puzzle and strategy games focus on problem solving, thinking, and planning skills. Some examples of puzzle and strategy game series include Portal™, Tetris®, and Civilization®.



ROLE-PLAYING

A role-playing game (also known as the acronym RPG) is a game that has a detailed, immersive, and well-defined world. A character in a role-playing game often has statistics that inform how they play. Some examples of role-playing game series include The Elder Scrolls®, Fallout®, Stardew Valley®, and Pokémon™.



SIMULATION

Simulation games are designed to mimic activities and situations you would see or experience in the real world. Some examples of simulation games include Cities: Skylines®, Planet Coaster®, Stardew Valley, and The Sims™ series.



SPORTS

A sports game simulates the practice of sport and physical activity. Some examples of sports games include Tony Hawk's™ Pro Skater™ and the FIFA® series.



CASUAL

Casual games are designed to be easy to pick up and put down again, allowing you to play at your own pace and desire. They are often also short and relaxing. Some examples of casual games include Plants vs. Zombies™ and the Animal Crossing™ series.



SANDBOX

Sandbox games allow the player to be creative and roam the virtual world freely. They often aren't linear and don't have much of a storyline. Some examples of sandbox games include Minecraft® and Terraria®.





CLASSIFICATION RATINGS



GENRES



In Australia, video games are rated using the same system that's used to rate films. Different rating systems are used in other countries. Australian video game and film ratings are decided based on the impact of violence, language, sex, drug use, themes, and nudity. Once they have been assessed, video games will be given one of the following ratings:



G - GENERAL

G is used for video games that are suitable for all ages.



PG - PARENTAL GUIDANCE

PG is used for video games that have content that's appropriate for children under 15 years of age. However, it's recommended that they watch or play this content with the guidance of a parent, carer, or guardian.



M - MATURE

M is used for video games that are not recommended for children below 15 years of age. It's important to note that this is only an advisory rating and children and young people under the age of 15 can still access these games legally.

It's important that your child or young person plays video games that suit their age and capacity level. This enables them to get the most out of their video gaming experience. It also helps to protect against and make sure that they aren't seeing inappropriate content. One way that you can make sure this happens is by checking the video game classification ratings on the games your young person is wanting to play.



MA 15+ - MATURE ACCOMPANIED

MA 15+ is used for video games that contains content that is inappropriate for children below 15 years of age. When purchasing game with an MA 15+ rating, a person might be required to show proof of their age to ensure they are aged 15 years or over.



R 18+ - RESTRICTED

R 18+ is used for video games that contains content that is inappropriate for children below 18 years of age. When purchasing game with an R 18+ rating, a person might be required to show proof of their age to ensure they are aged 18 years or over.



CTC - CHECK THE CLASSIFICATION

CTC is used for video games that haven't been rated yet. If a game has a CTC label, it's recommended that you continue to monitor the game as sometimes classifications are only announced closer to the games release date.





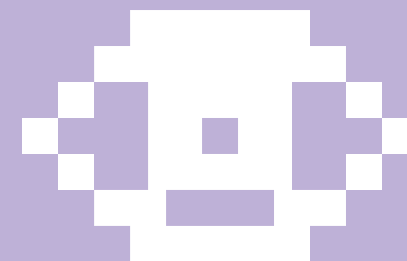
The Australian Government Classification website is a reliable source of information to find out more about these ratings. It also provides an option for users to search for a specific game to find its rating.



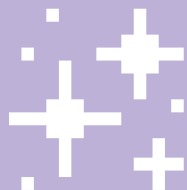
The Common Sense Media website also provides ratings and reviews of video games, TV shows, movies, apps, and books. It also allows both parents and children to add reviews and ratings for a game. You can access three full reviews per month for free on the Common Sense Media website. If you want to see more, you can pay monthly or yearly for a Common Sense Media Plus parent account.

TIP: The Classification website database has many video games listed. It's important to pay careful attention when searching for the video game rating you are after as some games can have very similar titles. For example, the video game The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim is listed as being rated MA 15+ but another one titled Elder Scrolls V Skyrim is rated G. The name of these games is almost the same (hint: there is no colon after the V of the second one) but they are different games with very different ratings.





SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR



HEALTHY VS UNHEALTHY GAMING

For many Autistic children and young people, playing video games is an area of strength and passion. Gaming can be a great way to support Autistic children by focusing on their interest, and it's important to keep gaming a fun, positive experience. Some Autistic children and young people can find it difficult to manage their video gaming habits and may need some support to maintain a healthy relationship with their gaming.

Some signs to look out for that will help you identify if your young Autistic gamer has a healthy relationship with video gaming may include:

HEALTHY

- They are engaging in their non-gaming activities and hobbies as well.
- They are having fun while playing and enjoying themselves.
- They continue to accept and participate in opportunities to play and socialise outside of video gaming.
- They can take breaks away from video gaming without becoming anxious or upset.
- They have a healthy and consistent sleep routine and avoid episodes of sleep deprivation or tiredness.
- They are taking regular breaks to move around and away from the screen.

UNHEALTHY

- They are now disengaged in other non-gaming activities and hobbies they once enjoyed.
- They are using playing video games to escape or numb issues or concerns.
- They begin to decline and turn down other social opportunities to play or socialise in favour of playing video games.
- They become unreasonably stressed during or after playing video games and feel like they must be playing when they're not.
- They are experiencing poor or disrupted sleep patterns and tiredness because of not getting enough sleep.
- They are experiencing pain or physical injuries from the repetitive movements they are using during video gaming.

SAFE VS UNSAFE GAMING

It can be difficult to work out whether your child is playing video games safely, especially if you are not a gamer yourself. Autistic young people may need rules and expectations around online safety to be communicated to them in a clear and direct way. Having open conversations about online safety with your children can help them to understand how to be safe online, and why it's important. Maintaining an open environment of trust and communication can create a safe space for your child to come and talk to you about online safety if they have concerns. These conversations allow you to explicitly teach your child skills that they can use to stay safe online.

Some signs to look out for that will help you determine if your young Autistic gamer is playing safely may include:

SAFE

- They are limiting what information they share online and when playing video games with others.
- They play under a username that protects their identity and personal information.
- They are playing games that are age appropriate or aligned to their capacity.
- They are playing with others respectfully.
- They maintain clear and open communication with their parents/carers about what they are playing and who they are playing with.
- They understand and know what steps they need to take if they see or experience something harmful or upsetting while playing video games.

UNSAFE

- They are sharing personal information, like their school, full name, address or contact details with others online who they have not met in person.
- They are playing under a username that contains their real name or reveals identifiable information about themselves.
- They are playing games that are inappropriate for their age and capacity.
- They are becoming aggressive or rude while playing video games with others.
- They are secretive and unwilling to share details with their parent/carer about what they are playing and who they are playing with.
- They are showing signs of distress or anxiety before, during or after playing video games.

FRIENDLY VS UNFRIENDLY GAMING

Autistic children and young people can find non-Autistic people's social cues and motives hard to read. It's important that you explicitly teach your child how to identify if someone is being friendly or unfriendly online, as this can be different to how it may look in person.

The signs below can help you to determine if your young Autistic gamer is having friendly or unfriendly interactions when playing.



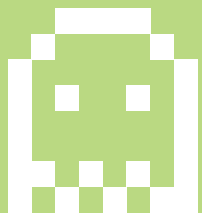
FRIENDLY INTERACTIONS

- The other person/s is respecting or complimenting their gaming style or creations.
- The other person/s is including and involving them in fairly in the game.
- The other person/s is listening to them and respecting what they need in the game (e.g., if they need to stop or take a break).
- The other person/s is speaking to them in a kind and respectful way.
- The other person/s is encouraging them and making the experience more enjoyable rather than upsetting.
- The other person/s is sharing content that they like or is helpful to them.



UNFRIENDLY INTERACTIONS

- The other person/s is unfairly attacking their gaming style or destroying their creations.
- The other person/s is excluding them in the game (e.g., leaving them out, not leaving any items for them to pick up).
- The other person/s is ignoring their needs and making it difficult for them to enjoy the game.
- The other person/s is speaking to them in a rude or aggressive way (e.g., inappropriate language, name calling).
- The other person/s is doing things to make them feel upset or distressed (e.g., harassing, putting them down).
- The other person/s is sharing content that is inappropriate or upsetting for them.



HAVE YOU EVER
WONDERED
ABOUT...





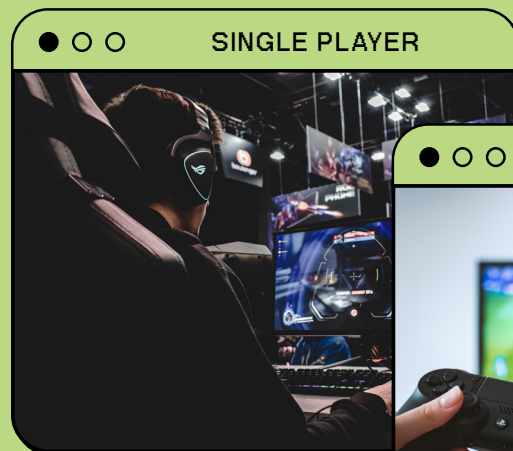
WHAT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SINGLE AND MULTIPLAYER GAMES IS?



Video games can be either multiplayer or single player. Some video games will be only single player, or only multiplayer, while other video games might have both options. A description of how many players can participate in a video game can usually be found on the games disc case or by looking for that information online.

SINGLE PLAYER

Single player means that the player is playing a video game by themselves. The gamer might still come across other characters, but they're not controlled by real people. These are called non-playable characters (also known as the acronym NPCs) and are controlled by the game.



MULTIPLAYER

Multiplayer means that the player is playing a video game with other real-life people. There are a few different ways that multiplayer video games can be played.

Some multiplayer games can be played over your local area network (also known as the acronym LAN). This refers to a group of computers and devices connected over one network in the same area. Gamers can use their LAN to play online with friends by using the same network. This is a good option to use if you want to avoid playing with other gamers you don't know personally.

Other multiplayer video games can be played using one console with multiple controllers that are connected to that single console. A Nintendo Switch is an example of a device that can support multiplayer gaming as it comes with two controllers.

You can also play multiplayer video games online by connecting to a gaming server. A server is a computer that provides the internet connection for many people to play together. There are many different types of servers located around the world and some servers may be limited to a certain number of people. Some servers also have set rules around the type of gameplay that can be used or the behaviour that should be displayed while playing on that server. There are some servers that have been designed specifically for Autistic gamers. Autcraft is a Minecraft server that provides a safe and fun space for young Autistic gamers and their families. YellowCraft is another Minecraft server that was created by Yellow Ladybugs and Next Level Collaboration for Autistic girls, women, and gender diverse people who are members of Yellow Ladybugs.



HOW GAMERS COMMUNICATE ONLINE WHEN PLAYING VIDEO GAMES?

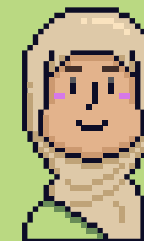
A multiplayer video game can often be easier and more fun when players can talk to one another while playing. Many multiplayer games will have in game chat functions for people to talk to each other. This could include a message chat, a voice chat, or both. Many games moderate their chats, so that players can't say inappropriate things, but not all games do this. Voice chats are also harder to moderate than text chats. It's important to be aware of how your young gamer engages with the chat function when they're playing a multiplayer video game.

Discord® is a social messaging platform where you can message others and voice chat with them. Many video gamers use Discord to communicate with other gamers they are playing with during the game. Some features about Discord include:

- that you need to be at least 13 years of age to join
- that you must be friends with people or part of the same server to be able to chat with them
- that the servers can be about anything, not just gaming
- that you can only join a server by being invited to join.



TIP: The [eSafety Guide](#) is a great resource that parents can use to find out about popular apps like Discord, YouTube®, or Twitch®. This guide can help you to learn about any age restrictions that the app might have, as well as any ways to moderate or report content if needed. The eSafety Guide also explains how these apps are generally used.



Discord servers are not always moderated but often have multiple channels that people can take part in. For example, if you join a server about the video game series Animal Crossing, there might be a channel where you can chat to others about Animal Crossing. However, there might also be other channels on that same server where you can chat to people about things not related to the video game series.

There is also often a voice chat channel, where you can join it and speak through your microphone to others. People can only hear you if they are also on that channel at the same time. The voice chat connects over the internet, doesn't use any phone data, and has no time limit. Gamers often use Discord when the video game that they're playing doesn't have its own voice chat function.

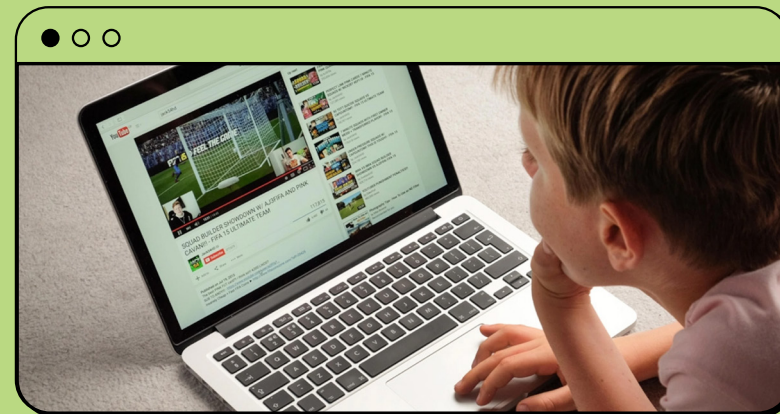


WHY GAMERS LIKE WATCHING VIDEOS OF OTHER PEOPLE GAMING?



Some young gamers don't just like to play video games, but they also like to watch videos of other people playing them too. This is usually done through watching videos on YouTube, or streams on Twitch.

TIP: Twitch is a website where people post live-streams. There are many kinds of streams available on Twitch, but it's mostly used for video gaming. While videos on YouTube are usually edited and pre-recorded, Twitch streams are live and unedited. They often go for at least an hour and have a chat that runs beside the stream that you are watching, allowing anyone watching the stream to engage with in the chat. These chats are usually moderated, which means that while sometimes people say inappropriate things, they are often warned or banned as a result. You must be at least 13 years of age to make a Twitch account.



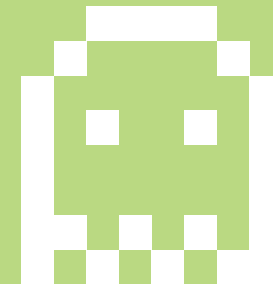
Sometimes people might not understand why a child or young person would want to watch someone else play a video game and not play it themselves, but there are many reasons for this. For some, it can be a way to engage with and watch a game that they don't or can't play themselves. If your Autistic child or young person doesn't like playing video games but wants to know what it is like, they might watch videos of someone else playing it. Others might watch videos of people playing games that they can't afford to buy themselves, and sometimes watching other people play video games can help teach new skills or ways of playing. For young Autistic gamers who might feel socially isolated or misunderstood, watching gaming can be a great source of belonging and make them feel like part of a community. It can also be a source of entertainment too. It's a lot like watching a cooking show instead of cooking yourself. Watching others play video games can be a way to relax while still engaging with your interests.



HOW GAMING CAN HELP TO SUPPORT SOCIAL COMMUNICATION?

Video gaming can be a great way for Autistic children and young people to strengthen their social communication skills. Sometimes finding, making and maintaining friendships can be difficult for Autistic people, and video gaming can be a great social support that helps them to establish connections through shared interests.

Video gaming can require the gamer to communicate with their teammates, talk to their opponents or those they are playing against, or teach elements of the game to others. These are all skills that can support an Autistic child or young person's social communication abilities outside of gaming. They are likely to also use these skills at school to communicate positively with their friends and peers.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Autism Connect is a free, national Autism helpline, providing independent and expert information over phone, email and webchat. For more information about Autism, or to talk about your situation, contact our Autism Connect Advisors via:

Phone: 1300 308 699

Email: info@autismconnect.org.au

Website and webchat:
www.amaze.org.au/autismconnect

Available from 8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

If you or someone you know is in danger and in need of immediate help, contact 000.

Lifeline – National free crisis counselling service with 24-hour crisis support.

Phone: 13 11 14

Website: www.lifeline.org.au

Kids Helpline – Free, confidential 24/7 online and phone counselling service for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years.

Phone: 1800 55 1800

Website: www.kidshelpline.com.au

Parentline – Free counselling and advice service for parents and carers.

ACT Phone: (02) 6287 3833

QLD & NT Phone: 1300 30 1300

NSW Phone: 13 00 52

SA Phone: 1300 364 100

TAS Phone: 1800 808 178

VIC Phone: 13 22 89

WA Phone: 08) 9368 9368 or 1800 111 546
for country callers

Note: Parentline operating hours differ between states and territories, please check the Parentline website of your preferred location for times.

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